



Human Services Committee

Raised Bill 895: AN ACT CONCERNING TEMPORARY FAMILY ASSISTANCE

Submitted by Alice Pritchard, Executive Director, CT Women's Education and Legal Fund
February 19, 2015

I am pleased to submit testimony on behalf of the Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund (CWEALF). CWEALF is a statewide non-profit organization dedicated to enhancing the personal and professional lives of women, girls and their families.

I've come here today to urge your support for RB 895 An Act Concerning Temporary Family Assistance.

Since 1999, CWEALF has worked with individuals and service providers involved in the Jobs First Employment Services program. What we have consistently witnessed is that people receiving cash assistance want to work. They are seeking educational opportunities that will prepare them for jobs so that they may become self-sufficient. As Connecticut has implemented new programs and designed different strategies to move the welfare population into self-sufficiency, by necessity, the system has to be flexible in its approach. This bill for the first time acknowledges that recipients, particularly those with low educational levels, need time to increase their skills and employability.

According to "Meeting the Challenge: The Dynamics of Poverty in CT," women and men in Connecticut who lack a high school diploma can expect to be "very poor," 72% and 67% of the time, respectively. Vocational training and post-secondary education are becoming more important for securing self-sufficient employment. In fact, 66 percent of jobs created by 2018 will require at least some post-secondary educationⁱ. Without basic skills such as reading, math and English proficiency, jobs with high wages, health benefits and room for advancement are out of reach for Connecticut's poor population.ⁱⁱ

Having post-secondary training, an Associate's or Bachelor's degree increases earning potential and employment opportunities for men and women. For example, the likelihood of women with a B.A. or an advanced degree earning an income above the state median is 68%.ⁱⁱⁱ Adults with higher levels of education are more likely to participate in the labor market than those adults with little or no education. Not only are persons with higher educational attainment more likely to be active in the labor market, they are more likely to have jobs that pay above the poverty level, have health benefits, and more job security. Improving basic skills and promoting post-secondary education will only help Connecticut families reach self-sufficiency.

According to the January, 2015 "At a Squint" produced by the CT Department of Labor, only 14% of the participants in the JFES system have education beyond the high school level. And "no high school diploma" is cited as a barrier to employment for 22% of the current caseload.

Additionally, this report shows that 48% of participants are involved in job search activities only. While having individuals in job search activities helps Connecticut achieve the federal workforce participation rate, it does nothing to ensure people receiving cash assistance acquire the education they need for the current middle skills jobs available so they can get off and stay off public assistance.

RB 895 draws attention to the importance of time for welfare recipients to pursue and complete secondary and post-secondary education. The current twenty-one month time-limit allotted for stabilizing one's family and pursuing educational and training activities is not sufficient to achieve adequate levels of training or education. There is a high demand in Connecticut for middle-skill workers, an educational and training level commensurate with an associate's degree. Even if an associate's degree is achieved in the assumed two years, which is a struggle even for some individuals in the most promising of situations, that still does not fit within the current time limit. It is high time this time limit is expanded and, in the case of this bill, stopped for those pursuing education as part of their Jobs First Employment Services employment plan.

Supporting RB 895 will be an investment in the future of Connecticut's families, as well as businesses and our economic prosperity.

ⁱ *The Basic Economic Security Tables for Connecticut, Wider Opportunities for Women, 2012*

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ⁱⁱⁱ *Meeting the Challenge: The Dynamics of Poverty in Connecticut*, Connecticut Association for Community Action and Connecticut Center for Economic Analysis, pg. 27, January 2013.